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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1455th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 4 April 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. BANGURA (Sierra Leone)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Consideration of the report of the Working Group (A/AC.109/L.1842)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to turn its attention to the open-ended Working Group's report concerning the Committee's organization of work (A/AC.109/L.1842). That report summarized the discussions and recommendations adopted at the meeting held by the Working Group on 29 March 1996. Since the members of the Working Group were also members of the Special Committee, and since all the questions raised by the report had already been debated by the Working Group, he suggested that the report should be considered as a whole.

2. It was so decided.

3. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the report contained an inaccuracy and a contradiction. Paragraph 5 (d) (iii) asked how to ensure that the administering Powers provided the Committee with regular, timely and up-to-date information on the Territories under their administration, in accordance with Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations. Article 73, however, did not stipulate that the administering Powers should transmit that information to the Committee, but rather to the Secretary-General. He had no objection if the information in question was also transmitted to the Committee, but the terms of the Charter should be respected.

4. The contradiction was between paragraphs 7 and 11 of the report. Paragraph 7 stated that in the absence of the representative of Papua New Guinea (the proponent of the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance with the Special Committee), the Working Group had decided to suspend discussion of that proposal so that it would have the benefit of hearing the representative of Papua New Guinea's idea for integration. Paragraph 11, however, stated that the calendar of meetings of the Subcommittee and the Special Committee for 1996 should remain as it was. Those two decisions contradicted each other. It was important for the Committee to hear the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea and understand his position before making a decision.

5. He also questioned whether the Working Group was empowered to make decisions. He did not see how the Working Group could decide anything, although its ability to do so was implied by the terms of the report. A working group could not make decisions; at most, it could adopt recommendations reflecting the positions of all its members.

6. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) recalled that the Subcommittee on Small Territories had been instructed by the General Assembly to receive the information from the administering Powers and to examine the situation in the small Territories. That mandate could only be modified by a decision of the General Assembly. The Working Group could study proposals aimed at improving the efficiency of the work of the Committee and the Subcommittee, but those proposals could only take effect if the General Assembly endorsed them.

Therefore, it would not be possible to change the programmes of work of the Special Committee and of the Subcommittee for the fiftieth session.

7. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) shared the view that it would be good for the Working Group to have the benefit of hearing the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea's ideas for integration. The Tunisian delegation supported the integration proposal, which should not be perceived as an attempt to abolish the Subcommittee since the questions before it would remain on the agenda of the Special Committee. The proposed integration presented several practical advantages. In particular, it would give delegations enough time to attend all the meetings, which would be reorganized in a more rational manner. The proposed integration would also permit the resolution of the previous years' scheduling problems, which had led to a squandering of resources that was unacceptable during a period of financial crisis. The proposed changes came within the scope of the restructuring that was being undertaken to improve the management and rationalize the work of the Organization. Scheduling the meetings of the Committee and the Special Committee more closely together, or merging them - while providing a sufficient number of hours of work - would also mean that the petitioners only had to be summoned once, instead of being made to return on different dates.

8. As for paragraph 12, he believed that the Working Group should continue its deliberations on the programme of work when the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea was present.

9. Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea) said that his country's Ambassador, who had proposed the integration, was not in New York at the moment, but would return very soon. It would be useful for the Committee to hear from him before continuing its deliberations on the programme of work.

10. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the statements of the representatives of Tunisia and Papua New Guinea underscored the need to postpone discussion of the question of integration slightly - for example, until the beginning of the following week - so that the Committee could conduct a substantive review and make a decision. It would only mean postponing the discussion a few days, and it would also permit the Committee to undertake a more in-depth examination of the question of the scheduling of the meetings of the Committee and the Subcommittee.

11. He wished to make several proposals concerning the Committee's programme of work and the report under consideration. First and foremost, in the interest of conforming with the United Nations Charter, he hoped that the Secretariat would be able to correct the inaccuracy he had pointed out in paragraph 5 (d) (iii) of the report.

12. Secondly, at its meeting on 29 March, the Working Group had reached consensus on the general thrust of the programme of work, but there had been some disagreement on certain specific points, in particular on the plans for the regional seminar. In that regard, the Special Committee should not lose sight of the financial problems being experienced throughout the United Nations system. In order to succeed, it must take a number of elements into account: the interests of the people in the Non-Self-Governing Territories, the positions

of the Committee members, and the point of view of the United Nations Secretariat.

13. The Secretariat had made it known that, given the financial crisis, it would prefer the seminar to be postponed. Several delegations had categorically rejected that idea and had insisted that the seminar should be held in May in Papua New Guinea. In his view, the discussion indicated that there was a lack of information about the financial situation, and he therefore asked the Chairman to ask the Controller or one of his representatives to provide the Committee with more details regarding those matters. That would enable the Committee to make the necessary decisions regarding the seminar in full knowledge of the facts, and it would also be helpful to the Committee in its work during the year to come. In deciding the date and location of the seminar, the Committee should, first and foremost, consider the interests of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Since the seminars were being organized for the benefit of their representatives, they were the ones who should decide where and when the seminars should take place. He therefore proposed that the Chairman should embark forthwith on consultations and should write to the administering Powers to determine whether the representative of the inhabitants of the Non-Self-Governing Territories wished to have a seminar in Papua New Guinea on the proposed date. That would enable the Committee to clarify the position of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and to determine who would be attending the seminar; it would therefore be able to better plan the seminar. It would be premature to make a decision regarding the date and location of the seminar before receiving the responses from the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

14. His delegation had written to the Committee secretariat asking what the Committee could do to reduce costs without impairing its ability to fulfil its mandate. He had also asked for an analysis of what it would cost to hold the seminar in Papua New Guinea as compared with what it would cost to hold it in New York. He looked forward to receiving an answer to those questions.

15. Mr. RIVERO ROSARIO (Cuba) took note with appreciation of the report of the Working Group concerning the programme of work for 1996, but he noted that the first three months of the year had already passed; he was greatly concerned by the slow rate of progress. It was high time the Committee made some firm decisions on the issues at hand. One question that needed to be resolved was whether a regional seminar should be held; Papua New Guinea had offered to host the seminar in May, but he did not really see that there would be enough time to contact the participants and organize everything if it were held then.

16. Although he had no particular objection to it, he did not see that it would be useful to invite the Controller to explain the financial situation to the Committee. The Secretary-General himself and other senior United Nations officials had already explained the situation the previous month before a packed house; everyone knew the Organization's financial situation was deplorable. On the one hand, certain Member States had paid their assessed contributions since that time; on the other hand, the General Assembly had already adopted the programme budget for the Committee's activities. There would seem to be little point in having the Controller come before the Committee particularly since,

although it might be useful to know the Secretariat's position, the Committee could hardly allow itself to be told what to do by the Secretariat.

17. Nor should the decision on whether or not to hold the seminar depend on what the administering Powers had to say. If the Committee waited until they gave their opinions, it might find itself in the twenty-first century before any seminar was held. In his view, it was a question of making a political decision and carrying out a mandate. As for determining whether it would be better to hold the seminar in the Pacific, where most of the Non-Self-Governing Territories were located, or at Headquarters in New York, it might be useful to learn the comparative costs of the two possibilities.

18. Concerning the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance with the Special Committee, he had not yet received any documents on the matter and wished to postpone consideration of the proposal to a later date. He none the less agreed with the Iranian delegation that amending the mandate of the Subcommittee or of the Committee itself was not a matter for the Committee to decide, but for the General Assembly. It was not possible, therefore, to change the decisions regarding the current session, including the dates of the meetings of the Committee and the Subcommittee, and he suggested that the Committee should continue its discussion of the proposal while awaiting a General Assembly decision on the matter.

19. Mr. KHAN (Secretary of the Committee), responding to one of the questions posed by the Russian delegation, said that the Secretariat had estimated what it would cost to hold the seminar at Headquarters as compared with what it would cost to hold it at Port Moresby: estimates came to $179,000 and $144,600 respectively. In other words it would cost $34,000 more to hold the seminar in New York. The request for documents revealing the Organization's financial situation and the impact of the crisis on the programmes related to decolonization had been sent to the Controller.

20. Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea) recalled that the purpose of the regional meetings was to give the people concerned an opportunity to participate in the work of the Committee and to express their views. Previously, meetings had taken place alternately in the Caribbean and Pacific regions, where the majority of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were located. Therefore, after consulting with the countries of the region, Papua New Guinea had offered, as it had done in 1993, to host the seminar in 1996. Given that time was of the essence, it was not necessary to wait for the administering Powers to make their position on the question known. In any event, Papua New Guinea would abide by the Committee's decision regarding the location of the seminar.

21. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee and the Committee was very important in so far as, if it were adopted, it would go a long way towards rationalizing the Committee's work. None the less, it should be considered carefully; that could be done when the Committee met in July. However, there would also have to be a General Assembly resolution on the matter because the Assembly had created the Committee. There did not seem to be any point in continuing the discussion of where the seminar should be held since the Secretary had just indicated that it would be less expensive to hold the seminar away from Headquarters.

22. Mr. AKBARUDDIN (India) said that the Committee should consider the proposals for integration of the Subcommittee at a later meeting, as had just been suggested, before referring the matter to the Assembly, if necessary, so that it could adopt an appropriate resolution. Another body was responsible for considering the reform of the United Nations system and it would be more appropriate for that body to look into that question.

23. The proposal to hear what the Controller, or one of his representatives, had to say on the financial difficulties of the United Nations would set an awkward precedent. Any organ meeting to consider its work programme could then ask the Secretariat to explain a situation which everyone understood in general terms, whereas other organs had the express mandate and responsibility for considering the specifics. Members of the Committee were not adequately qualified to make a swift assessment of any consequences which the financial difficulties of the United Nations might have for the work of the Committee. It would therefore be extremely difficult for his delegation to agree to a request by the Committee for an update every two or three months, when it intended to operate within the limits of the resources allocated to it under a General Assembly resolution.

24. Bearing in mind the information provided by the Secretariat concerning the cost of organizing the seminar, the Committee should accept the offer from Papua New Guinea. The question remained whether the Committee should wait for that country's representative to return before making its decision.

25. Mrs. KHAN-CUMMINGS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the Committee had very little time to take important decisions concerning its work programme and, so, sometimes gave the impression of trying to rebuild a house while still living in it. Concerning the organization of the seminar and the restructuring of the Subcommittee's work, it should be remembered that the Subcommittee received its information on the Non-Self-Governing Territories from the representatives of those Territories when seminars were held, and also from petitioners. Petitioners came to air their views to the Committee after the Subcommittee had met. It would therefore be a good idea to reorganize the timetable so that the Subcommittee would effectively have access to the information provided by petitioners. The objective must be to coordinate activities better and make more efficient use of all the means available to the Committee for the fulfilment of its mandate.

26. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said, regarding the integration of the Subcommittee with the plenary Committee, that the Working Group favoured deferring the question so as to study the Papua New Guinea proposal more closely. The schedule of meetings of those two bodies should therefore remain unchanged as long as no decision had been taken. His delegation favoured organizing a seminar in 1996 and considered, taking into account the information provided by the Secretariat, that the meeting should preferably be held at Port Moresby. His delegation had no objection to the Controller addressing the Committee, as the information that he would provide could be very useful in organizing the seminar. His delegation agreed with the Cuban representative that it was not necessary to consult the administering Powers before holding the seminar.

27. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran), referring to his earlier statement, said that, pending a decision by the General Assembly, there should be no modification concerning the Subcommittee. The Special Committee was the only United Nations body dealing with decolonization, so there were no overlaps in that area. It had already rationalized its work by limiting the length of its sessions. His delegation had proposed in 1994 that the schedule of meetings should be organized more judiciously. From the figures given by the Secretariat, it was clear that the cost of organizing the seminar was relatively modest, compared to other United Nations activities - and that was in connection with an issue which had been before the United Nations for years and which remained as topical as ever: several Territories were still not self-governing and a number of populations were still living in conditions approaching colonization. The objective of the seminar was to promote decolonization, and nothing could justify cancelling it in 1996, at a time when the United Nations financial crisis was putting a political slant on the issue. All the members of the Committee would agree, if necessary, to cut the other costs, but the seminar must take place, within the limits of the resources allocated and with the participation of the representatives from the Non-Self-Governing Territories. The Committee would have to adopt the timetable of its activities at the present meeting, as there was no other official meeting scheduled before June.

28. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) agreed with those delegations which had called for more information before making a decision. Thus, despite the response from the Secretariat, it would be useful to listen to the Controller, or one of his representatives, as that would help Committee members to better appreciate the financial aspects of organizing the seminar. One might ask how it had been possible to estimate the cost of the meeting, as it was still not known exactly who would take part. The seminar organized in 1995 had brought together 11 Committee members, eight representatives of the Secretariat, and only four representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories, almost all of whom belonged to non-governmental organizations. If the Committee did not make better preparations for the seminar in Papua New Guinea, it was more than likely that the majority of participants would be representatives of the Secretariat and the Committee, and that the expenditure would mainly be to cover their travel costs and subsistence allowances. The Secretary-General, in his statement about the financial situation of the United Nations, had clearly stated that the first economy measure would be to reduce travel related expenses. That measure applied also to travel by under-secretaries-general in the case of preventive diplomacy and peace-keeping missions affecting the lives of millions. It was therefore important to be better informed on the financial question.

29. The representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories must be consulted on the organization of the seminar. Certain delegations considered that the task could not be entrusted to the administering Powers. His delegation was not of that opinion and noted that the Working Group's report referred to the development of cooperation with the administering Powers (para. 5 (d)) and the question of how best to secure the full participation of the latter in the work of the Committee (para. 5 (d) (i)). The opinion of the elected representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories should be sought, and decisions concerning matters of such importance should not be made in haste. On that understanding, his delegation favoured holding the seminar.

30. The CHAIRMAN recalled that all the administering Powers had been invited to cooperate with the Committee so that the interests of the populations of the Territories concerned would be properly protected.

31. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia), responding to the delegations that felt that it was impossible to consider that year the proposal to integrate the Subcommittee with the Committee, noted that the problem was not with integration per se; the issue was not a substantive one but a procedural one. Even though the programmes of work of the two organs had already been adopted by the General Assembly, there would be no harm in coordinating the items on their respective agendas more closely and rearranging the meetings of the Subcommittee and the Committee so that they considered decolonization issues in parallel with each other. Such an approach would enhance the effectiveness of the Special Committee and be consistent with the reforms under way throughout the Organization. Instead of scheduling the work of the Subcommittee for June and that of the Committee for July, it might, for example, be arranged that the Subcommittee meet in mid-June and be immediately followed by the Committee. He hoped that the Secretariat would be able to propose something along those lines.

32. Turning to the holding of the seminar, that was the first time that he had heard the matter discussed. After listening to the other speakers, however, he felt that a matter of principle was involved. While the decision to hold the seminar was entirely up to the Committee, that did not obviate the need to determine the objectives and usefulness of the meeting and, as with all other conferences, to obtain the relevant information. Once it was established that the objectives could not be achieved without the seminar, it would still be necessary to try and convince all those who were opposed to it. Since the question merited in-depth consideration, the Committee could not take a decision on it at the current meeting.

33. Ms. YAO Yuhua (China) agreed with the position taken by other delegations on the integration of the Subcommittee with the Committee. It would be better to wait for the return of the Ambassador of Papua New Guinea in order to hear what he had to say and then reconsider the issue.

34. Most delegations were in favour of holding the seminar. It was clear from the mid-term review of the Plan of Action for the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism that the Committee must complete its work and that hearing the opinions of the populations concerned would assist it in that task. Differences persisted within the Committee, but it was still possible to resume a dialogue and work towards a consensus. The position of the Russian delegation, which had stated repeatedly that the Secretariat's views should be heard, warranted consideration. It should also be noted that, although not a rich country, Papua New Guinea had, in view of the Organization's financial problems, offered to host the seminar, thereby demonstrating its commitment to the course of decolonization. For that, the Committee should express its gratitude.

35. On the third issue - the calendar of meetings - her delegation had no strong feelings and was prepared to go along with the general opinion.

36. The CHAIRMAN, summing up, said that the Committee needed to reach a decision on several aspects of the Working Group's report. On the question of the integration of the Subcommittee with the Committee, all delegations accepted that the Committee could not alter the relevant mandates but could continue to consider ways of enhancing its effectiveness. The Committee would await the return of the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to obtain definite information with which to undertake a substantive review.

37. All delegations were agreed as to the timeliness and usefulness of a regional seminar. Concerning the recommendation of the Working Group, however, only the Tunisian and Russian delegations seemed to have expressed reservations about the need to take a decision at the current meeting. He asked Committee members to state their positions briefly and clearly on the matter.

38. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) said that he had not expressed reservations about the holding of the seminar, he had simply stated his views on a matter of principle. Since the issue had been considered in depth the previous week, he would go along with the position of other delegations as a matter of solidarity.

39. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) disagreed with the Chairman's analysis of the situation: other delegations had in fact expressed doubts about the advisability of taking a decision immediately, without the benefit of the necessary information. However, he agreed with other delegations that the seminar should be well planned. The Committee would have to revert to considering two issues: the integration of the Subcommittee and the Committee, which could be taken up after the return of the Subcommittee Chairman, and the holding of the seminar. He hoped that, by the time it took up the latter issue again, the Committee would have had an opportunity to hear from a representative of the Office of the Controller.

40. Such an approach would only delay the Committee's work by a few days and the Committee would have the satisfaction of knowing that it had not acted in haste without full knowledge of the facts. He was not questioning the need to hold the seminar, but simply suggesting that the issue be considered the following week, once the Committee had heard from a representative of the Secretariat.

41. Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) said that the Committee must hear from the Controller as soon as possible if it was to come to a decision and hold the seminar in May as planned.

42. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Secretariat's position was perfectly clear and that postponing a decision in order to hear it again was pointless and would only delay the Committee's work. The decision to hold the seminar in May could be taken at the current meeting.

43. Turning to the Committee's calendar of meetings, the Committee should take a decision at the current meeting while keeping in mind the Tunisian proposal. Whether the meetings of the Subcommittee and the Committee could be held closer together depended on the resources available to Conference Services, but for 1996, their meetings must be held separately, on the dates scheduled.

44. Mr. TAPIA (Chile) endorsed the proposal for the integration of the two organs but agreed with the Tunisian delegation that such integration should, to start with, be functional, pending a decision by the General Assembly on structural integration.

45. His delegation felt that the seminar was very important, but that the key issue was where and when it would be held. The information given by the Secretariat clarified the issue of its venue. As for its timeliness, he agreed that the Committee's work was very important, since it was the only organ responsible for decolonization, but felt that the reality of the working conditions and financial problems facing the Organization must be borne in mind. His delegation agreed with the representative of Indonesia that the Committee needed to hear all points of view as soon as possible, in order to have time to organize the seminar properly if it was to be held in May as planned.

46. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee adopt the report of the Working Group as a whole.

47. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) recalled that several delegations considered it advisable temporarily to postpone a decision on the issue. It was not absolutely essential that the Committee take a decision that day. An attempt should be made to reach a consensus so that some delegations would not feel that their position had not been taken into consideration.

48. The CHAIRMAN insisted that the Committee adopt the report of the Working Group as a whole.

49. Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation) said that the Committee could not adopt the report as a whole because there was a major error in paragraph 3 that needed to be corrected. Furthermore, his delegation wished to express certain reservations. If the Committee chose to ignore the wisdom of delaying its decision by a few days in order to reach a consensus, his delegation asked that its position be reflected faithfully in the relevant documents.

50. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee adopt the report with such amendments as would be required to reflect the concerns of the Russian Federation, on the additional understanding that the Russian delegation's position would be reflected in the relevant documents.

51. It was so decided.

DEPARTURE OF THE CHAIRMAN

52. The CHAIRMAN, announcing his imminent departure, took his leave of the members of the Committee, which he was probably chairing for the last time.

53. Mr. SAMADI (Islamic Republic of Iran), Ms. YAO Yuhua (China), Mrs. KHAN-CUMMINGS (Trinidad and Tobago), Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia), Mr. RIVERO ROSARIO (Cuba), Mr. YARKA (Papua New Guinea), Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic), Mr. CHTCHERBAK (Russian Federation, Mr. AKBARUDDIN (India), Mr. TANOH-BOUTCHOUE (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. SOW (Mali), Mr. TAPIA (Chile), Mr. JENIE (Indonesia) and Mr. MILLETTE (Grenada) expressed their gratitude to

the Chairman for the skill and diplomacy with which he had performed his duties, and wished him every success in his new life.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.